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Speech for the Wallace Stevens Society (poem)

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Speech for the Wallace Stevens Society

We agree, then, that the particular
like a lump of chemical disinfectant
is deadly—or, at least, death-inducing—

as though in our mild attempt to clean house
it poisoned the lot of us and we went cheerfully
under, part way toward some broader appeal.

At a bargain price, too! These things we buy,
you know, may last forever, if we don't
actually use them. But if we do they kill us

with their smell of immortality.

Now, it's not
that I want to be a valetudinarian,
since I haven't swallowed the modern pill, not me

alone. And what of the pleasures of reclining
casually in the company of friends you can count
on one hand, their smiles warm and wavy?

Afterwards, you're liable to feel a tinge
of general well-being, the way a salt bath
tempers the nerves, little by little,

seeping slowly into your skin like high fashion,
or a sunburn after a day at the beach. In fact,
an idea, for all its unique properties

only strong lotions can entirely block,
might stay with you into the next season,
not just as a line you admire when the two of you,

lying naked before each other, try to measure how far
you've come together, but as an urge as new as cells
in your limbs, gaily playing with themselves until,

with the inevitability of a used car, they die.
Yet as I've said, here is something we can agree on,
like the lift of a window in winter, our theme.

John Gery
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